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The relapse of William: a
comedy in one act.

Easton, Pa. 1910

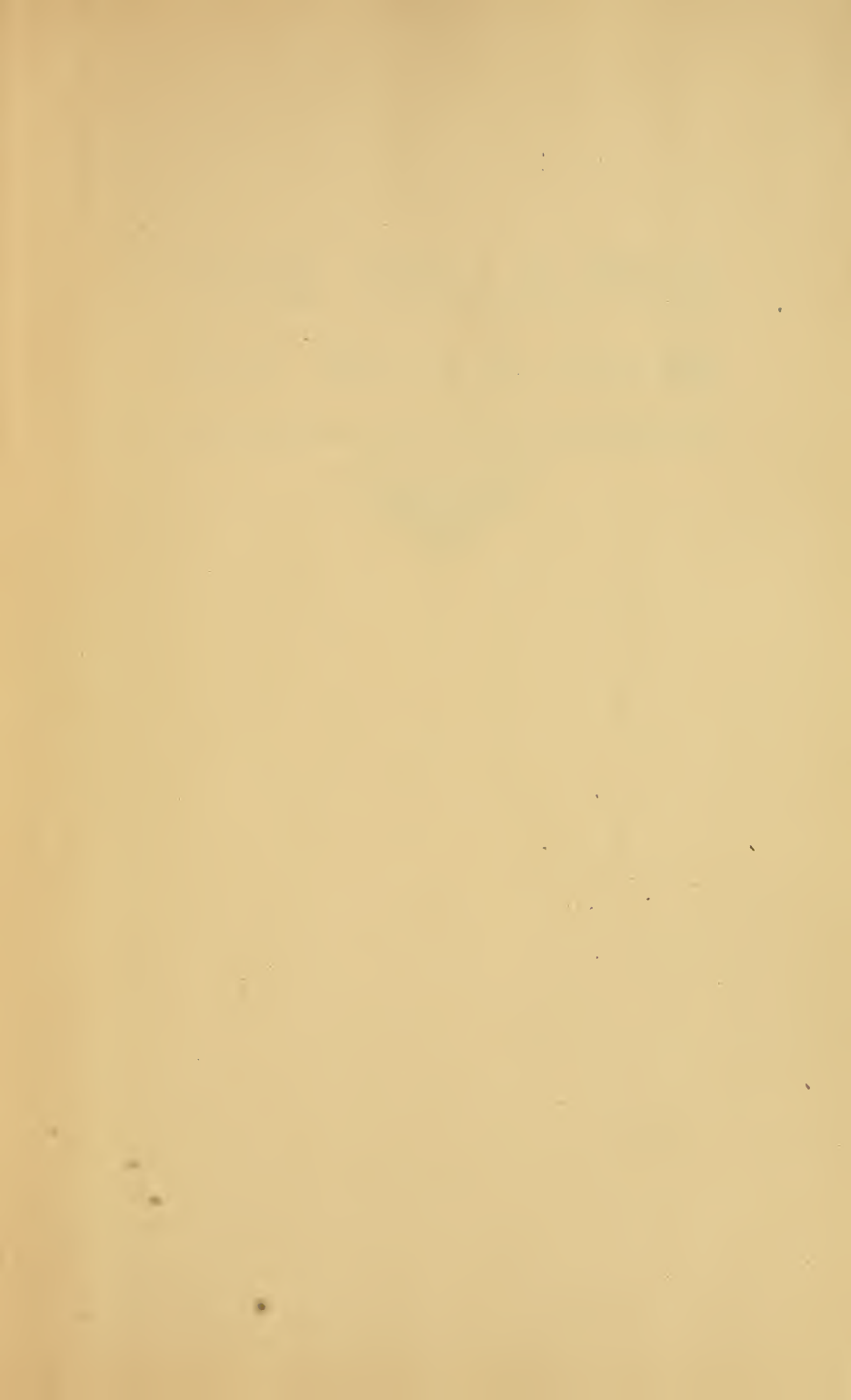


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THE RELAPSE OF WILLIAM





The RELAPSE
of WILLIAM



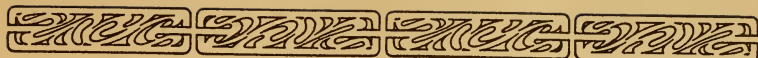
A COMEDY IN ONE ACT
By ROLAND MOLINEUX

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

MR. HARRY NORWOOD

WILLIAM

MRS. KATE NORWOOD

SET SCENE

The home of Mr. and Mrs. Norwood, New York City.

A dining-room richly and tastefully furnished. Doors right and centre. Sideboard with silver service at left.

TIME: EVENING.



The RELAPSE of WILLIAM

DISCOVERED: *Mr. Harry Norwood, a gentleman approaching middle age, is seated alone at dining table which is cleared, with the exception of after dinner coffee. Mr. Norwood is smoking a cigar and turning over the pages of his evening paper. A short scene of business only to show that Harry is at home and that he is very comfortable.*

ENTER WILLIAM: *He is greatly agitated and unhappy. William is a small man of about sixty-five with a face which indicates one who has suffered greatly. He walks in a characteristic manner, which is almost furtive. There are to be gradations in the development of William's character; at first, we see in him only an old fool; then he wins our respect and at last we love him. William is to be garrulous and slightly deaf. All his mistakes are prompted by kindness of heart. He is entirely ignorant of the ways and moods of such women as Mrs. Norwood; to him, his master's bride is a strange and wonderful object of adoration, but she fails at first to understand William.*

WILLIAM

[Speaking in almost a whisper and looking at door]
Master Harry.

HARRY

[Indifferently and reading paper]
Well, William?

WILLIAM

[Brokenly]
Master Harry.

THE RELAPSE

HARRY notices distress in WILLIAM'S voice and turns to him.

HARRY

What's the matter, William?

WILLIAM

[Very earnestly]

The missus is angry, Master Harry. She's very angry.

HARRY

[Returning to his paper]

About what?

WILLIAM

At me, sir.

HARRY

Nonsense!

WILLIAM

[With emotion]

She don't want me here any more; she's told me to find another place.

HARRY

[Surprised and putting down his paper]

Why, my wife hasn't found out anything, has she?

WILLIAM

[Garrulously]

A woman knows without "finding out," Master Harry. The missus distrusts me and she's given me my notice, Master Harry; she's given me my notice.

HARRY

When did she do that, William?

WILLIAM

Just now, right after dinner.

HARRY

Sure you didn't misunderstand her?

OF WILLIAM

WILLIAM *goes to the sideboard and arranges the silver, which he handles lovingly.*

WILLIAM

[*Sadly*]

Oh, I heard her, Master Harry; she told me to go away.

HARRY

Now, now, William, remember she's a little bride—maybe she's nervous or a bit homesick, or something like that. We must make her happy.

WILLIAM

I've tried so hard to please her, but she doesn't like me, Master Harry—she doesn't like me.

[*Door closes off stage.*]

HARRY

[*Confidently*]

Humor her, William! Humor her! I'll show you!

[*Enter KATE*]

MRS. KATE NORWOOD *is a young bride; very lovely but unreasonable*

HARRY

[*Pleasantly*]

What's this about William, Kate?

KATE

That will do, William. [WILLIAM *does not hear her*]

[*Louder*]

That will do, William! Do leave the silver alone for a moment!

WILLIAM

Yes "mum."

KATE

[*Wearily*]

Please—please stop calling me "mum!"

WILLIAM

Beg pardon, "ma'am"—no—"mum"—I mean——

[*Stops helplessly*]

THE RELAPSE

HARRY notices KATE'S glance of
despair.

HARRY

[*Sternly, but with a look at WILLIAM*]

Yes, William, you must really remember it's "madam"—
"madam."

WILLIAM

[*Miscrably*]

I know—I know, Master Harry; I'll remember—I'll remember.
[*Exit WILLIAM*]

HARRY

William tells me that you have given him notice.

KATE

[*Sweetly*]

I'm sorry I had to, Harry; but you see, we really *must* get rid of
him.

HARRY

But why, Kate?

KATE

Don't you see, my dear, that he's absolutely impossible?

HARRY

But you might have consulted me, Kate; William has been with
me for years and years.

KATE

[*Seriously*]

Oh, he was all very well to wait on you as a bachelor, but *now*
we ought to have a butler, in livery, with our monogram on
the buttons.

HARRY

[*Surprised*]

Good Lord!

KATE

[*Reprovingly*]

Harry!

OF WILLIAM

HARRY

Very well, Kate dear; William can wear a livery if you insist on it.

KATE

[*Laughing*]

William in a livery! It would only make him more ridiculous than he is! No, William will not do at all, and you know it! Why, he'd make a perfect show of us when we begin to entertain!

HARRY

[*Conciliatingly*]

Now, you *don't* want to turn the old fellow into the street?

KATE

Why, he could get something else to do—something he *could* do. Oh, I've got a *splendid* idea!

HARRY

Good! What is it?

KATE

Take William in your office! Make him your bookkeeper!

HARRY

[*Laughs*]

My dear! He's had no training for that position.

KATE

Make him a porter, then.

HARRY

He's too old.

KATE

Pension him; send him to some home—some charity.

HARRY

[*Seriously*]

Oh! that would break his heart!

KATE

[*Pouting and a trifle suspicious*]

Why are you always so frightfully considerate of William?

THE RELAPSE

HARRY

Well, I'm fond of him.

KATE

[*Breaking out*]

That's just it, you've spoiled him! He doesn't know his place.
He considers himself one of the family!

HARRY

I haven't noticed it.

KATE

Well, I have. He's altogether too familiar; I'm tired of listening
to his eternal chatter!

HARRY

Don't you appreciate that it's his kindness of heart? He's only
trying to entertain you.

KATE

Entertain me!

[*Imitating WILLIAM*]

"You'd better sit over here at the window by the light, mum.
Don't you feel a draft, mum? This chair by the fire is more
comfortable."

HARRY

He thinks he must take care of you, Kate.

KATE

And he's forever at the sideboard polishing and mumbling over
our silver.

HARRY

That silver is the apple of his eye.

KATE

[*Suddenly*]

Why?

HARRY

[*After a pause*]

Because he's in charge of it, I suppose.

KATE

[*Becoming excited*]

No!

HARRY

[*Anxiously*]

Kate! What's the matter?

KATE

There's something about him! I can't explain it, but I feel it!
And he's forever watching me!

HARRY

[*Soothingly*]

Kate! Kate!

KATE

Sometimes I look up—William is there!

HARRY

Well?

KATE

But I do not hear him enter the room. Who is he? What did
he do before he came to you?

HARRY

What difference does that make, now, Kate?

KATE

Why do you make such a mystery about him?

HARRY

There's no mystery at all.

KATE

He's no butler, and he's never been a butler! I know it by the
way he talks.

HARRY

Just give him time; he'll learn his duties perfectly.

KATE

[*Sitting on the arm of HARRY's chair*]

Harry, dear, don't you think I'm competent to manage the house-
hold?

THE RELAPSE

HARRY

[*Soothingly*]

Of course you are! Of course you are, Kate!

KATE

Before we were married you said that everything here should be as I wished it; didn't you?

HARRY

I did.

KATE

That I could have my own way about the house.

HARRY

Yes, dear.

Kate jumps up and rings bell.

But to-night you're tired and nervous; rest—sleep over it! Wait till to-morrow, then you'll see the whole matter in a different light.

[*Enter WILLIAM*]

KATE

William, I gave you notice this afternoon; I want you to go *now* do you understand me?

WILLIAM

[*With hand to ear*]

Yes, mum; what is it?

KATE

[*Screaming*]

Pack up your things!

WILLIAM

[*Looking appealingly at HARRY*]

Yes, mum.

HARRY

Wait, Kate!

KATE

I'm tired of screaming at him.

H A R R Y

[*Firmly*]

But I can't do it, Kate!

K A T E

[*Surprised*]

"Can't!" What do you mean—"can't?" Do you mean to say that William is to remain, after I have discharged him?

WILLIAM *polishes the silver excitedly.*

H A R R Y

That's what I mean, Kate.

K A T E

[*Angrily*]

You won't let me dismiss him?

H A R R Y

Why, Kate, is this going to be our first quarrel?

K A T E

[*Furiously*]

It's your fault! You began it! You humiliate your wife like this in the presence of a servant!

H A R R Y

Now, don't destroy the honeymoon; it's to last forever, you know. Let's drop the subject. We'll go to the theater.

K A T E

No, I don't care to go!

H A R R Y

Please, Kate.

K A T E

No!

H A R R Y

[*Getting his hat and coat*]

Then I'll look in at the Club.

[*Exit KATE in a temper*]

Business for WILLIAM helping on with coat.

THE RELAPSE

WILLIAM

Is she "hep" to me, Master Harry?

HARRY

No, if she knew anything she'd have mentioned it, William.
Everything will be all right, she'll get over it.

[Exit HARRY, cool and masterful]

WILLIAM, greatly troubled, returns to the silver.

[Enter KATE, hastily]

KATE

[Excitedly]

William, my trunk!

WILLIAM

[Aghast]

Trunk?

KATE

[Speaking louder]

No, my dress-suit case!

WILLIAM

[Pretending to be stupid]

But, mum——

KATE

"Mum!" My—dress-suit—case! Get it at once! And my valise——

WILLIAM *hesitates*

They are in the hall closet.

[Looking at watch]

And hurry, I've just time to catch my train.

WILLIAM

[Looking at clock]

Did you say "train," mum? What time does it go?

KATE

Never mind!

[Exit WILLIAM, slowly]

Kate brings in clothes from next room.

[*Re-enter WILLIAM with dress-suit case and valise.*

WILLIAM

[*With assumed stupidity*]

Were you thinking of making a visit, mum?

KATE

I don't care to discuss the matter with you.

Kate packs her clothes in dress-suit case.

WILLIAM

[*Trying again*]

But surely you won't stay long, will you?

KATE

Telephone for a cab!

Business for KATE, selecting pair of gloves which she intends to wear. She lays them on table.

Business for WILLIAM, at 'phone.

WILLIAM

Give me Grammercy 6223.

KATE

[*Suspiciously*]

The Club!

WILLIAM

Master Harry always gets his cabs there. "Hello, is Mr. Norwood there?"

KATE

[*Taking receiver away*]

No, you don't!

WILLIAM

Oh, isn't Master Harry going with you?

THE RELAPSE

KATE

[*At 'phone, during which WILLIAM stealthily unpacks the dress-suit case*]

"Hello! No, I do not want to talk to Mr. Norwood; I want you to send a cab to his house at once! You know the address? All right, thank you!"

KATE

[*To WILLIAM, sarcastically*]

There!

*KATE goes to door of her room
and points off stage.*

See those hat boxes on the shelf? Go and get them.

[*Exit WILLIAM into other room*]

KATE

[*Directing him*]

Stand on the chair! Not that one! The large white box! No!

Yes, and the other—the blue one—bring them here!

[*Re-enter WILLIAM with two hat boxes.*]

WILLIAM

Are these the ones?

Kate selects the hat in blue box.

KATE

[*Handing white box to WILLIAM*]

Put it back on the shelf and hurry up!

WILLIAM

Yes, mum.

KATE brings in toilet articles and jewelry. While doing so, WILLIAM changes the hats in the blue and white boxes; he leaves the wrong hat in the blue box, taking the right one in the white box.

Re-enter WILLIAM; he watches KATE pack her toilet articles and jewelry in the valise.

OF WILLIAM

WILLIAM

[*Comments pathetically as she places articles in valise*]

Wedding present from Master Harry's best man——

"Gift of the groom"——

KATE watches WILLIAM out of corner of her eyes and then turns and discovers the unpacked dress-suit case. She repacks it with display of temper.

KATE

[*Going to hat box*]

Now!

KATE finds the wrong hat

[*Completely out of patience*]

William, you did that on purpose!

WILLIAM

I'm very sorrow, mum; shall I get the other one?

KATE

No, I'll get it myself; you're only trying to delay me.

[*Exit KATE*]

WILLIAM hides her gloves in the dress-suit case.

Re-enter KATE with hat and fur coat. Business for KATE at looking-glass putting on her hat.

WILLIAM

[*With consternation*]

You're not really going! You can't be in earnest!

KATE

You'll see whether I am or not.

WILLIAM

But at least wait till to-morrow.

KATE

[*Speaking to herself*]

Not much!

THE RELAPSE

WILLIAM

Oh, but you'll wait and say good-bye to Master Harry, won't you? It is a dreadful thing to leave your husband this way—so sudden like. You're surely going to write him a letter and tell him where you've gone?

KATE

I'll give you the pleasure of letting him know that I've gone home.

During the preceding WILLIAM has possessed himself of KATE'S fur coat. Business for WILLIAM with coat, very slowly. Trying to gain time and looking at clock.

KATE

My coat, William.

WILLIAM

What a beauty! Master Harry gave you this, didn't he? You wore it yesterday morning and he and I watched you from the window; you certainly looked very well in it, mum; you looked very well, indeed! Wasn't we proud and happy!

Kate snatches coat and puts it on without his assistance!

WILLIAM

[Pleading very sincerely while she puts on her coat]

I know I'm only a servant, mum, but if you go away you'll regret it all the rest of your life. Don't you remember that you promised to love, honor and obey your husband. Yes, you're breaking your promise, [*earnestly*] and a promise is an awful thing. Not that I don't mean a little disagreement now and then is all right, because the making up—the making up—is the sweetest part of all.

KATE

[Looking around and speaking to herself]

Where are my gloves?

WILLIAM

[While they look for gloves]

I'll look for them, mum. Suppose something happened to him—

OF WILLIAM

taken sick, or an accident—a cruel, heart-rending, pitiful accident!

[*A pause*]

What will Master Harry do without you? What's to become of him after you're gone?

KATE

[*Sarcastically*]

He'll have *you* to entertain him. Now, William, *where* are my gloves!

KATE *at last opens dress-suit case and finds her gloves, which she puts on.*

See if the carriage has come.

WILLIAM

[*At window*]

No, mum.

KATE

[*Running to window*]

It has; I heard it! Where's my purse! My purse!

[*Picks up gold purse which WILLIAM watches eagerly*]

Ah! Here it is! Now bring that bag downstairs.

WILLIAM *takes the dress-suit case and stands still. KATE goes to door.*

WILLIAM

[*As KATE is about to exit*]

Wait! Wait! Mrs. Norwood, you've forgotten something!

WILLIAM *snatches up large photograph of HARRY and rushing over to KATE holds it in front of her face.*

[*With great emotion*]

Oh, look at this, mum! You'll take it with you, won't you?

During the following he picks her pocket.

THE RELAPSE

This can easily be done by means of a duplicate purse which WILLIAM conceals in his hand and passes it quickly over her pocket and then shows it in his hand before putting into his own pocket.

He adores you. Yes, and you love him—I know you do. Every one loves Master Harry. [*Very earnestly*] I know you love him, mum, and if he could walk right in here now, everything would be forgiven and forgotten!

KATE

Stop talking and bring that bag!

WILLIAM replaces the photograph sorrowfully.

KATE

Hurry up!

[*Feeling her pocket*]

Oh, wait a minute!

KATE discovers the loss of her purse.

WILLIAM

Yes, mum; what is it?

KATE

[*Eying WILLIAM suspiciously*]

My purse—my gold purse!

WILLIAM

[*Feigning surprise*]

Yes, mum?

KATE

Where did I put that?

WILLIAM

Shall I look for it, mum?

WILLIAM pretends to assist KATE in her search for the purse. We see his satisfaction at having accomplished his purpose.

OF WILLIAM

KATE

[*Looking around excitedly*]

I don't see it anywhere!

[*Enter HARRY*]

KATE

[*Startled*]

Oh!

WILLIAM'S joy at seeing his master appear is apparent. He moves a chair so as to conceal KATE'S baggage.

HARRY

[*Surprised at the disordered room*]

What's the matter?

WILLIAM

[*Hesitatingly*]

She's lost her pocketbook, Master Harry. We've been looking for it everywhere.

HARRY

[*Looking around*]

I should say you had!

KATE

[*Suddenly*]

It's not lost!

HARRY

Where is it?

KATE

Your friend William has it!

WILLIAM manifests embarrassment.

HARRY

[*Astonished*]

William? Impossible!

KATE

I saw it right here a moment ago and now it's gone! No one could have taken it but William!

THE RELAPSE

HARRY

But why should he take it?

KATE

For spite! Because I wanted him discharged!

HARRY

William, have you Mrs. Norwood's purse?

WILLIAM

No, Master Harry.

KATE

Search him!

HARRY

[*Confidently*]

Kate, I think that's unnecessary. William's word is——

KATE

[*Interrupting him. Going to 'phone*]

If you don't I'll call an officer!

WILLIAM

[*In terror*]

Don't do that, Mrs. Norwood! Don't do that, I beg of you!

HARRY'S face shows his doubt
and astonishment at WILLIAM'S
fright.

KATE

[*In triumph*]

I thought so! [*To HARRY*] Now, are you satisfied?

HARRY

[*Very seriously*]

William, I'm going to search you.

WILLIAM

Yes, Master Harry.

HARRY

And you know the reason why.

WILLIAM

Yes, sir; I do.

HARRY searches WILLIAM; the purse is not found on him; the very pocket into which we have seen him put it is turned inside out, but it is not there.

HARRY

[*Angrily to KATE*]

Now, see what you've made me do! [*To WILLIAM*] William, I apologize!

KATE

[*With scorn*]

Apologize! Apologize!

HARRY

[*To KATE*]

Yes; for the injustice I've done him.

KATE

[*Excitedly*]

No; you beg his pardon because you're afraid of him!

WILLIAM

Oh, Mrs. Norwood; let me explain——

HARRY

[*Interrupting William*]

I believe you accused William of this thing simply because you don't like him; you hoped to get rid of him by this unjust accusation!

KATE

And you don't discharge him because you don't dare do it! This man has some hold upon you! There is something between you two—something you want concealed!

HARRY and WILLIAM look at each other

HARRY

Nothing discreditable; won't you take my word for it, Kate?

KATE

No; I insist on knowing!

THE RELAPSE

HARRY

Some other time; when you are more reasonable.

KATE

I'll not live with you another hour with this mystery hanging over me. [*With great earnestness*] I'm going to leave you!

She goes to the door; WILLIAM detains her.

Let me alone! Let me alone! Don't you dare touch me!

WILLIAM

I don't see how you can go, mum; you haven't any money. You've lost your pocketbook, you know.

KATE

[*At door*]

I'll go, purse or no purse!

HARRY

This is dreadful!

WILLIAM

You'd better tell her, Master Harry.

HARRY

She'll send you away.

WILLIAM

Tell her, Master Harry.

HARRY

No!

WILLIAM

[*To KATE, in despair*]

What do you want to know?

KATE

I want to know all about your relations with my husband from the beginning! Where did you get acquainted with him?

When WILLIAM starts his story KATE and HARRY are at opposite sides of the room, or at least far apart.

OF WILLIAM

WILLIAM

It was right here, mum; in this room—at night—on my knees; right over here by the sideboard!

WILLIAM suddenly lifts the cover off sideboard, which forms a bag, inclosing the silver; he sets it upon the floor and kneels beside it.

And all this very same silver was piled up on the floor around me. This dinner set—these knives and forks—and that spoon—see the bend in the handle? That's how I knew the stuff was solid! I was putting 'em into my bag——

[Business with improvised bag]

Heard a noise!

[Springing up]

Closed the slide of my dark lantern—so!

WILLIAM pushes an electric button; lights go out. KATE screams and runs and pushes two buttons in her attempt to get light, a button at back of the room by door; one light goes up at sideboard and one in outer hall, which reflects in mirror, creating "spotlight" effect, disclosing WILLIAM, collar turned up, hair pulled over eyes, masked with handkerchief.

That's just what happened! The electric lights sprang up and I was looking into the barrel of a revolver in the hand of Master Harry!

KATE

[Scornfully]

I knew it! You were a thief!

WILLIAM

[With great dignity]

I was a "second-story" man—an "all around crook!"

THE RELAPSE

KATE

[In triumph]

And Harry caught you—had you arrested—sent to prison!

WILLIAM

[Smiling]

No! He was too good-natured that night to do anything like that.

KATE

[Suspiciously]

What do you mean?

WILLIAM

He was drunk.

KATE

[Astonished]

He? Harry? Intoxicated?

WILLIAM

[Reminiscently]

You may say that, mum. He sat over there with his feet on the table; he said I was a good fellow——

KATE

Stop! I've heard enough!

WILLIAM

[Continuing]

He made me sit down and he gave me a cigar—a Perfecto, mum, —and began to read me a lecture about being dishonest. And then I explained to him that his habit meant suffering, miserable old age, poverty, disgrace; and that it was a thing which had brought many a good man down—down, down to what I was at that time. I proved to him that the only difference between drink and dishonesty is that one is the beginning and the other is the end.

WILLIAM *pauses, overcome with emotion.*

KATE

[Interested]

Yes; go on!

OF WILLIAM

WILLIAM

[With great earnestness]

He made me tell him all about myself, and I told him the truth, mum, and he seemed to understand how, after the law once gets hold of a man there isn't a chance in the world for an honest job! Perhaps you've heard the saying "Once a crook, always a crook." It's pretty nearly true, mum; but it shouldn't be.

KATE

Well! Well! What did he do then?

WILLIAM

[Proudly]

Made me his butler! Put me in charge of the very stuff I tried to steal!

KATE

Of all the absurd things to do.

WILLIAM

Don't say that, mum! He gave me a chance to be honest! No one in the world but Master Harry would have done that.

KATE

But the risk he ran in trusting you!

WILLIAM

No risk, mum; he was perfectly safe, for he made an agreement with me that night. A solemn, binding agreement, mum, and we shook hands on it.

KATE

Now, we're going to get at it! What was this agreement?

WILLIAM

[With great earnestness]

We swore that he would "cut out" the liquor after that—that he would never take another drop—and that I should give up being dishonest and that we should live together as long as we kept our pledges.

[With pride]

Then I put him to bed, and I put that silver back where it belonged.

THE RELAPSE

KATE

And you have kept that promise, Harry?

HARRY

Yes; and so has William.

The preceding scene has taken place on a dark stage; only one light shines on WILLIAM'S face. WILLIAM turns up the lights and we see the effect of his story. KATE is in her husband's arms. No word is spoken, but WILLIAM'S delight is apparent.

Business for WILLIAM going to door.

WILLIAM

[*Sadly*]

Good-bye, mum.

HARRY and KATE

[*Surprised*]

William!

WILLIAM

I'm leaving, Master Harry.

HARRY

No, no, William! Everything is all right now!

WILLIAM

I'm not going to stay and spoil your happiness!

I know the missus doesn't like me——

KATE

[*Interrupting*]

Yes, I do, William—now!

WILLIAM

I've got to go, Master Harry; there's another reason.

HARRY

What is it, William?

OF WILLIAM

WILLIAM

[*Solemnly*]

I've broken my pledge.

HARRY

[*With surprise*]

William! You did steal her pocketbook?

KATE

[*Suddenly realizing*]

For me, Harry; to keep me from leaving you.

HARRY

[*Astonished*]

What do you mean, Kate?

KATE

[*Pushing back chair that conceals her baggage*]

Look, Harry, my things were packed; don't you see that I have my hat and coat on? Why, all this evening I've been trying to run away from you—and William wouldn't let me.

HARRY

[*Reconciled*]

Kate!

KATE

[*Genuinely*]

William, you shall stay here just as long as you live! I forgive you for stealing my purse—but—where is it?

HARRY

You said you didn't have it.

WILLIAM

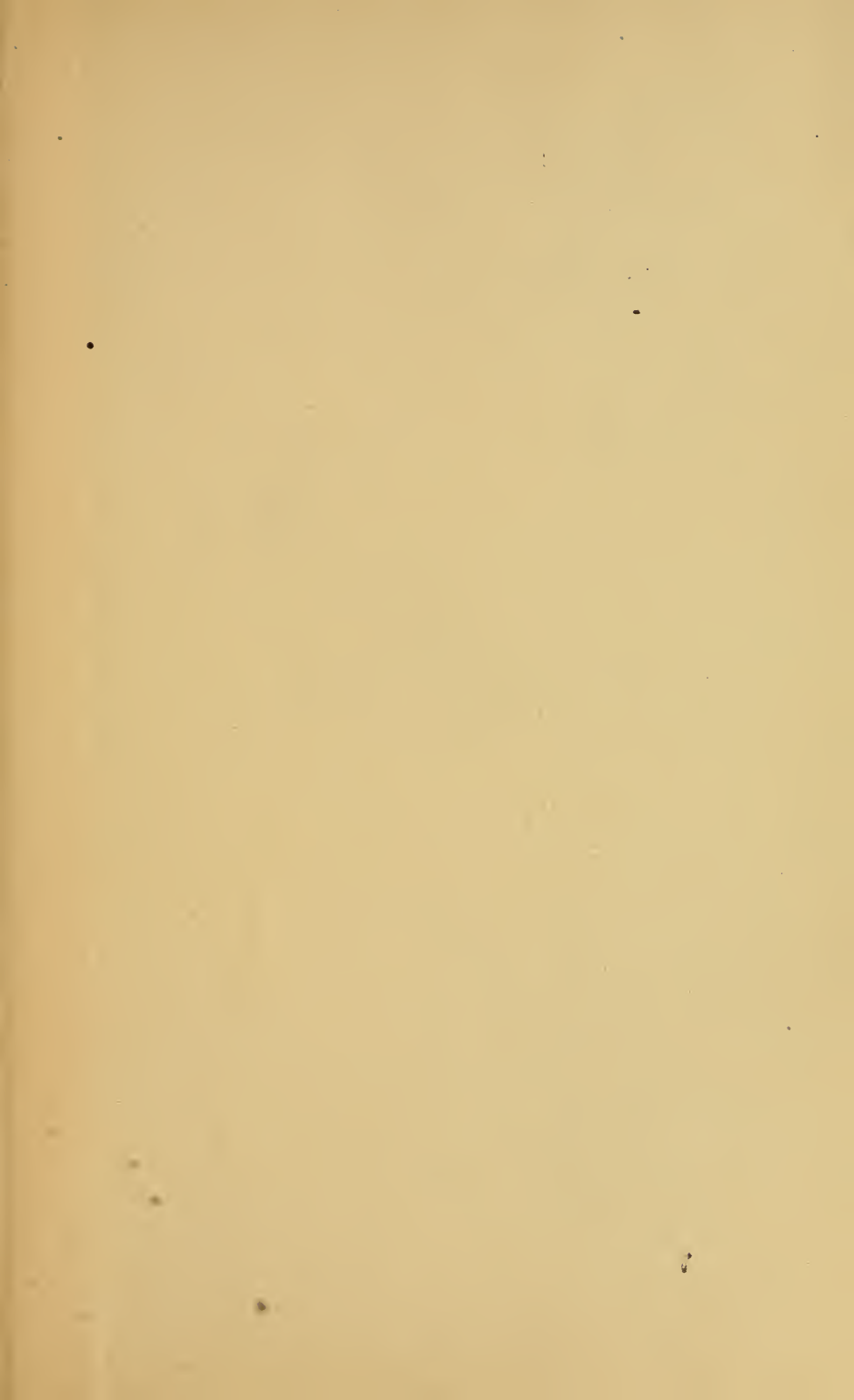
Now you'd "frisk" me, so I "planted" it.

WILLIAM goes to HARRY's photograph, takes her purse from behind it and hands it to KATE. Then he goes to the silver and begins to polish it.

CURTAIN.

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